

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resource Commission**

ITEM

12

INFORMATION

TOPIC

Endangered and Threatened Plants and Animal Species - Bald Eagle

Iowa's Endangered Plants and Wildlife law protecting endangered plants and animals was passed in 1975. The goal of the law is to recover species to the level where the additional protection of the act is no longer necessary. The first state list of threatened and endangered species was established by administrative rule in 1977. Department staff conducts investigations, collects existing published and unpublished information, and reviews information provided by the public relating to species distribution, population dynamics, habitat requirements, and threats for plant and animal species. Based on this information and consultation with scientists that have expertise with individual species or groups of species, the Department provides recommendations to the NRC concerning possible changes to the state list. The NRC then adopts these recommendations by amending the rules regulating such. Amendments to the list follow the administrative rulemaking process, allowing for public input for proposed changes.

On August 8, 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the federal list of threatened species due to the improved status of the species. Nationally, the number of nesting pairs has increased from 417 in 1963 to an estimated 9,789 in 2007. Because of this dramatic comeback, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined the bald eagle has recovered to the extent that it no longer requires the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Department staff will review available information and consult with various experts concerning the biological status of the bald eagle in Iowa and provide a recommendation regarding the bald eagle's status in Iowa as a threatened species to the NRC at a future meeting.

Ken Herring, Administrator
Conservation and Recreation Division
March 13, 2008

Attachment: Bald Eagle Information

A Summary of Bald Eagle Information for Iowa

On August 8, 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the list of federal threatened species. Nationally, the number of nesting pairs has increased from 417 in 1963 to an estimated 9,789 in 2007. Because of this dramatic comeback the bald eagle no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

The Bald Eagle gained federal protection under the 1940 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. This law provided protection from shooting and destruction of nests, but a new threat emerged with the widespread use of DDT after World War II. DDT and similar persistent insecticides were found to accumulate in aquatic systems. When eagles fed on fish that had accumulated DDT, a metabolite of DDT interfered with the ability to deposit calcium in eggshells. Thinned eggshells cracked and broke easily and the number of fledged eagles dropped dramatically. The ban on use of DDT and similar pesticides in the 1970's allowed the bald eagle and other species to once again achieve normal reproduction. Protection under the Endangered Species Act and state regulations also helped with recovery by protecting habitat and educating the public about the needs of the bald eagle.

In Iowa the bald eagle was extirpated as a breeding species from about 1905 to 1977. At the time of European settlement the bald eagle was considered common and nested throughout the state. Records of nesting eagles continued until 1905 when the last reported nest was found in Jasper County. Loss of habitat and shooting of eagles caused the extirpation of the bald eagle as a breeding species in Iowa.

In 1977 an eagle nest was found in Allamakee County, the first known nesting attempt in over 70 years. In 1996 there were 54 nests in 20 Iowa counties. Today it is estimated that there are over 200 nesting pairs in Iowa. Nests have been reported from 80 of Iowa's 99 counties. While the number of new nests reported in Iowa is slowing, eagle population expansion continues, with nests in six new counties (O'Brien, Wapello, Page, Boone, Franklin, and Dickinson) in 2006 and four (Cedar, Greene, Hancock, and Lee) in 2007. If the current rate of nesting increase continues, Iowa could have a bald eagle nest in each of the 99 counties within a few years. Although the IDNR has not had the resources to conduct comprehensive annual surveys, we believe this estimate is, if anything, quite conservative because we consistently receive nest reports from our field staff, county conservation board staff and the public. The attached maps present the number of nests reported by county since 1977 and nests reported between 1990 and 2007. The second map demonstrates the association of reported nests and river systems in Iowa.

The 1983 Northern States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan listed Iowa's recovery goal as 10 nesting pairs by 2000. The recovery goal for the 24 states included in this plan was 1,200 nesting pairs. Currently, the estimated number of breeding pairs for the 24 states is over 4,400. In fact, Minnesota alone has exceeded the goal for all 24 states with 1,312 nests. The bald eagle population has greatly exceeded recovery goals established for delisting at the national level. Although no specific goal was set for state delisting, it is apparent that the bald eagle is no longer endangered or threatened in Iowa.

Bald eagles will still be protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In fact, the federal act provides for civil and criminal penalties of up to \$5,000, while Iowa's penalty is \$1,000 for threatened or endangered animal species. In addition to protection from direct harm, the federal act also prohibits activities that disrupt eagles at nests, foraging areas, and important roosts because loss of these areas can disturb or kill eagles. These are the same protections that have been available under Iowa's threatened and endangered species law.

The goal of Iowa's threatened and endangered species law is to recover species to levels where protection under this section of the law is no longer necessary. The continuous improvement of the bald eagle population in Iowa during the last 30 years is proof the long-term survival of this species is secure. The recovery of our national symbol in Iowa has been the product of many individuals, organizations, and especially landowners who have provided habitat for breeding pairs of eagles. Removal from the state list is a reason to celebrate because the bald eagle no longer faces the threats that caused its extirpation from the state for over 70 years.